

**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA**

In re:

Jon L. and Janet M. Johnson

Chapter 7

Debtor(s).

BK 04-31268 GFK

NOTICE OF HEARING ON MOTION TO DISMISS CHAPTER 7 CASE

TO: The Debtor, all creditors and other parties in interest:

The United States Trustee has filed a motion to dismiss the above-captioned case under 11 U.S.C. §707(a) and (b).

The Court will hold a hearing on this motion at 3:00 p.m. on August 2, 2004, in Courtroom No. 228 B, at the United States Bankruptcy Court, United States Courthouse, at 316 North Robert Street, in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Any response to this motion must be filed and delivered not later than July 28, 2004, which is three days before the time set for the hearing (excluding intermediate Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays), or filed and served by mail not later than July 22, 2004, which is seven days before the time set for the hearing (excluding intermediate Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays). Local Bankruptcy Rule 9006-1.

Dated: _____

CLERK OF BANKRUPTCY COURT

By: _____
Deputy Clerk

**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA**

In re:

Jon L. and Janet M. Johnson

Chapter 7

Debtor(s).

BK 04-31268 GFK

NOTICE OF HEARING AND MOTION TO DISMISS UNDER 11 U.S.C. § 707

TO: The debtor(s) and other entities specified in Local Rule 9013-3.

1. The United States Trustee, by his undersigned attorney, moves the Court for the relief requested below and gives notice of hearing.

2. The Court will hold a hearing on this motion at 3:00 p.m. on August 2, 2004, in Courtroom No. 228 B, at the United States Bankruptcy Court, United States Courthouse, at 316 North Robert Street, in St. Paul, Minnesota.

3. UNLESS A RESPONSE OPPOSING THE MOTION IS TIMELY FILED, THE COURT MAY GRANT THE MOTION WITHOUT A HEARING.

4. This Court has jurisdiction over this motion pursuant to 28 U.S.C. Sections 157 and 1334, FED.R.BANKR.P. 5005 and Local Rule 1070-1. The United States Trustee has standing to file this motion pursuant to 28 U.S.C. Section 586(a) and 11 U.S.C. Section 307. This proceeding is a core proceeding. The petition commencing this Chapter 7 case was filed on March 4, 2004. The case is now pending in this Court.

5. This motion arises under 11 U. S. C. Section 707 and FED.R.BANKR.P. 1017, 2002 and 4004. This motion is filed under FED.R.BANKR.P. 9014 and Local Rules 9013-1 to 9013-5.

Movant requests that this case be dismissed.

6. From the lists, schedules and statements filed by the debtors, it appears that they may have the ability to pay a substantial portion of their unsecured debt without hardship.

7. The debtors have listed the following debts:

- (a) On Schedule D, Creditors Holding Secured Claims, the debtors list two claims totaling \$ 73,135.82, secured by a mortgage, and a commercial loan.
- (b) On Schedule E, Creditors Holding Unsecured Priority Claims, the debtors lists no claims.
- (c) On Schedule F, Creditors Holding Unsecured Nonpriority Claims, the debtors lists fourteen claims totaling \$ 94,964.00.

8. The debts listed in the debtor's Schedule of Liabilities appear to be primarily consumer debt. *See* Debtor's Schedule F. The debtors checked on the Petition that the nature of the debts are consumer/non-business.

9. On Schedule I, the debtors list monthly net income of \$ 3,750.80. The debtors are married and list no dependents. On Schedule J, the debtors lists monthly expenses of \$3,953.18.

10. On April 21, 2004, the United States Trustee wrote to the debtors for additional financial information. *See* Att. Ex. 1.

11. The debtors failed to respond to the United States Trustee's letter and failed to provide the information requested in that letter.

12. The United States Trustee cannot complete his Section 707(b) investigation without the information listed in his letter. Therefore, pursuant to FED. R. BANKR. P. 1017(e)(1), the United States

Trustee hereby advises the debtors and their counsel that all of the information listed in attached Exhibit 1, shall be submitted for the court's consideration at the hearing.

13. The failure of the debtors to cooperate with the United States Trustee by turning over the information requested prior to or as a response to the Section 707(b) Motion to Dismiss is a basis to dismiss this case for bad faith under Section 707(b) and under Section 707(a).

14. The United States Trustee reserves the right to argue that the debtors have an ability to pay under Section 707(b) and that the case should be dismissed on that basis, once the information requested is submitted.

15. In the alternative, the net income on Schedule I (\$ 3,750.80) plus voluntary retirement contributions and 401k loan repayments provides for net income of \$ 4,372.26.^{1/} The debtors list no

^{1/} Voluntary contributions to retirement/pension accounts are not reasonable or necessary expenses for determining disposable income and that said contributions should be reflected in the calculation of disposable income. See e.g. *In re Harshbarger*, 66 F.3d 775 (6th Cir.1995) (adopting per se rule that voluntary contributions into 401K account are disposable income for Section 1325 purposes); *In re Anes*, 195 F.3d 177 (3rd Cir.1999) (adopting per se rule that voluntary contributions to retirement plan constitute disposable income under Section 1325) *In re Taylor*, 243 F.3d 124 (2d Cir.2001) (adopting a case by case test to look at the age of the debtor, the mandatory nature of the contributions and impact on employment, dollar amount of any penalties, and other circumstances); *In re Delnero*, 191 B.R. 539, 542 (Bankr. N.D.N.Y. 1996); *In re Cornelius*, 195 B.R. 831 (Bankr. N.D.N.Y. 1995); *In re Cavanaugh*, 175 B.R. 369, 373 (Bankr. D. Idaho 1994); *In re Scott*, 142 B.R. 126, 135 (Bankr. E.D. Va. 1992) (not reasonably necessary under §1325(b)); *In re Fountain*, 142 B.R. 135, 137 (Bankr. E.D. Va. 1992) (cannot make voluntary contribution unless pay Ch. 13 creditors in full); *In re Ward*, 129 B.R. 664, 668 (Bankr. W.D. Okla. 1991); *In re Colon Vazquez*, 111 B.R. 19, 20 (Bankr. D. Puerto Rico 1990); *In re Festner*, 54 B.R. 532, 533 (Bankr. E.D.N.C. 1985); *In re Harshbarger*, 66 F.3d 775, 777 (6th Cir. 1995) (Ch 13 case: not necessary for maintenance or support); *Collins v. Hesson (In re Hesson)*, 190 B.R. 229, 237-38 (Bankr. D. Md. 1996).

Voluntary 401K loan repayments are also considered part of disposable income by a majority of courts. *In re Cohen*, 246 B.R. 658, 666-67 (Bankr. D. Colo. 2000) (citing *In re Anes*, 195 F.3d

dependents. Several expenses on Schedule J appear excessive. For example, expenses for food (\$ 1,000) should be reduced by \$ 500 for \$ 400 food plus \$ 100 personals; home maintenance of \$ 200 should be reduced to \$ 100; clothing of \$ 200 to \$ 150; medical and dental of \$ 400 (no schedule F medical claims) should be reduced to \$ 100; telephone expenses of \$ 216 should be reduced to \$ 100.

The debtors expenses would be approximately \$ 3,000, which would provide disposable income of approximately \$ 1,300. Disposable income of \$ 1,300 would enable the debtors to pay approximately \$ 46,800 or 49% toward their unsecured creditors of \$ 94,964.00.

WHEREFORE, the United States Trustee respectfully requests that this chapter 7 case be dismissed.

Dated: June 9, 2004

Respectfully submitted,

HABBO G. FOKKENA
United States Trustee
Region 12

By: /s/ Sarah J. Wencil
Sarah J. Wencil
Trial Attorney
United States Trustee's Office
1015 United States Courthouse
300 South Fourth Street
Minneapolis, MN 55415
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177, 180 (3rd Cir. 1999); *In re Jaiyesimi*, 236 B.R. 145, 148 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 1999); *In re Delnero*, 191 B.R. 539, 543 (Bankr. N.D.N.Y. 1996); *In re Fulton*, 211 B.R. 247 (Bankr. S.D. Ohio 1997)).



U. S. Department of Justice

Office of the United States Trustee

*Districts of Minnesota, North Dakota,
South Dakota and Iowa*

U.S. Courthouse, Suite 1015

612 / 664-5500

300 South Fourth Street

FAX 612 / 664-5516

Minneapolis, MN 55415

April 21, 2004

Jeff David Bagniefski
P O Box 6
Rochester, MN 55903

Re: *Jon L. and Janet M. Johnson*, Bankr. No. 04-31268

Dear Mr. Bagniefski:

As you are aware, the Office of the United States Trustee must investigate every debtor pursuant to 11 U.S.C. § 707(b). There is incomplete information in the above named case for our office to complete its investigation of this case. Please provide **copies** of the following information on or before May 21, 2004.

1. Copies of last three pay stubs for the debtors.
2. Copies of the 2002 and 2003 state and federal tax returns, including attachments (W-2s).
3. Provide any documentation showing that any reduction for retirement is mandatory (if nothing is submitted, the United States Trustee shall assume that it is a voluntary contribution).
4. Copies of check stubs or receipts for last three months of food expenses.
5. Copies of check stubs or receipts for last three months of medical and dental expenses.
6. Copies of check stubs or receipts for last three months of clothing expenses.
7. Copies of check stubs or receipts for last three months of recreation expenses.
8. Copies of check stubs or receipts for last three months of charitable contributions.
9. Copies of check stubs or receipts for last three months of phone and cell phone expenses.

ATTACHED EXHIBIT "1"

10. Copies of check stubs or receipts for last three months of home maintenance expenses.
11. The debtors have checked that this is a consumer case. If this is no correct, please set forth which debts were incurred for a business purpose.

Please call if you have a question or concern about this letter.

Sincerely,

HABBO G. FOKKENA
UNITED STATES TRUSTEE



Sarah J. Wencil
Trial Attorney

cc: Jon L. and Janet M. Johnson
Charles W. Ries, Chapter 7 Trustee

VERIFICATION

I, Sarah J. Wencil, attorney for the United States Trustee, the movant named in the foregoing motion, declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct according to the best of my knowledge, information and belief.

Executed on: June 9, 2004

Signed: /s/ Sarah J. Wencil
Sarah J. Wencil
Trial Attorney

**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA**

In re:

Jon L. and Janet M. Johnson

Chapter 7

Debtor(s).

BK 04-31268

MEMORANDUM OF LAW IN SUPPORT OF MOTION TO DISMISS

This memorandum is submitted pursuant to Local Rule 9013-2(a). It appears that dismissal of this Chapter 7 case is appropriate under 11 U.S.C. 707(b).

Analysis of Section 707(a)

Section 707(a) provides:

The court may dismiss a case under this chapter only after notice and a hearing and only for cause, including —

- (1) unreasonable delay by the debtor that is prejudicial to creditors;
- (2) nonpayment of any fees and charges required under chapter 123 of title 28 [28 U.S.C. § 1911 et seq.]; and
- (3) failure of the debtor in a voluntary case to file, within fifteen days or such additional time as the court may allow ... the information required by paragraph (1) of section 521, but only on a motion by the United States trustee.

11 U.S.C. § 707(a). Dismissal for cause is not limited to the three examples set forth in Section 707(a); use of the word “including” means that the examples are nonexhaustive. *Huckfeldt v.*

Huckfeldt (In re Huckfeldt), 39 F.3d 829, 831 (8th Cir. 1994) (*see* citations therein).

The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals has specifically adopted the reasoning of the bankruptcy court in *In re Khan*, 172 B.R. 613 (Bankr. D. Minn. 1994) to determine whether bad faith may be “cause” under Section 707(a). *Huckfeldt*, 39 F.3d at 832. The Bankruptcy Court in *In re Khan*, held that bad faith under Section 707(a) is the following:

[T]he Court should look first at the debtor’s manifested attitude toward the integrity of the bankruptcy process. The real question should be whether the debtor is in bankruptcy with an intent to receive the sort of relief that Congress made available to petitioners under the chapter in question ... and is willing to responsibly carry out the duties that Congress imposes on debtors as the cost of receiving such relief.

[B]ad faith in the filing of a Chapter 7 petition would be evidenced by a pervasive and orchestrated effort on the part of the debtor to obtain the benefits of a bankruptcy filing while at the same time intentionally and fraudulently taking action to avoid any of the detriments. Such an effort might involve ..., without a concomitant acceptance of the statutory duties of financial disclosure, cooperation with the trustee, and surrender of non-exempt assets.

172 B.R. at 625 (citations omitted).

The failure of the debtors to provide the information requested in the Motion to Dismiss is cause to dismiss this case under Section 707(a). Under Section 707(b), Congress designated the United States Trustee as the only party, besides the Bankruptcy Court, who has standing to bring a Section 707(b) motion to dismiss. 11 U.S.C. § 521(3) states that “the debtor shall ...cooperate with the trustee as necessary to enable the trustee to perform the trustee’s duties under this title.” *See* 11 U.S.C. § 324(a) (stating that bankruptcy court had power to “remove a trustee, other than the United States trustee.” Therefore, indicating that the use of the term “trustee” in the Bankruptcy Code may include

the United States trustee.). In addition, Local Bankruptcy Rule 2020-1 provides: "The ... debtor shall comply with all reasonable requirements promulgated by the United States Trustee with respect to ... furnishing information and the debtor shall cooperate with the trustee and the United States Trustee in furnishing information reasonably required for the proper administration of the estate."

The information requested by the United States Trustee in attached exhibit 1 is reasonable and should not be burdensome for the debtors to acquire. Most of the information requested consists of check stubs or receipts for regularly monthly bills, copies of tax returns or loan agreements, which one would expect an individual to maintain or would expect to be easily obtainable.

The United States Trustee will request that the Bankruptcy Court dismiss this case for cause pursuant to Section 707(a) if the debtors fail to cooperate with the United States Trustee's Office in its investigation pursuant to Section 707(b) by turning over the information requested pursuant to Federal Bankruptcy Rule 1017(e)(1).

Analysis of Section 707(b)

A Motion to Dismiss for Substantial Abuse is governed by Section 707(b) of the Bankruptcy Code, which provides:

After notice and a hearing, the court, on its own motion or on a motion by the United States trustee but not at the request or suggestion of any party in interest, may dismiss a case filed by an individual debtor under this chapter whose debts are primarily consumer debts if it finds that the granting of relief would be a substantial abuse of the provisions of this chapter. There shall be a presumption in favor of granting the relief requested by the debtor. In making a determination whether to dismiss

a case under this section, the court may not take into consideration whether a debtor has made, or continues to make charitable contributions (that meet the definition of 'charitable contribution' under section 548(d)(3)) to any qualified religious or charitable entity or organization (as that term is defined in section 548(d)(4).

11 U.S.C. § 707(b) (1994) (as amended by Religious Liberty and Charitable Donation Protection Act of 1998). The United States Trustee bears the burden of showing substantial abuse. *In re Dubberke*, 119 B.R. 677, 679 (Bankr. S.D. Iowa 1990).

(1) The Debts Are Primarily Consumer Debts.

Section 101(8) of the Bankruptcy Code defines "consumer debts" as "debt incurred by an individual primarily for a personal, family, or household purpose." 11 U.S.C. § 101(8) (1994). "Debt" is defined as a "liability on a claim." 11 U.S.C. § 101(12) (1994). "Claim" is defined as a "right to payment, whether or not such right is reduced to judgment, liquidated, fixed, contingent, matured, unmatured, disputed, undisputed, legal, equitable, secured, or unsecured." 11 U.S.C. § 101(5)(A) (1994).

The purpose of the debt generally determines whether a debt is a consumer debt. *Zolg v. Kelly (In re Kelly)*, 841 F.2d 908, 913 (9th Cir. 1988); *In re Palmer*, 117 B.R. 443, 446 (Bankr. N.D. Iowa 1990). If the credit transaction does not involve a business transaction or a profit motive, it is usually regarded as a consumer debt. *Palmer*, 117 B.R. at 446 (citing *In re Booth*, 858 F.2d 1051, 1054-55 (5th Cir. 1988)); *In re Berndt*, 127 B.R. 222, 223 (Bankr. D.N.D. 1991) (citing *Kelly* and *Booth*, but distinguishing *Booth* by concluding that private investment debts, not used to further an

ongoing business, were consumer debts).

In the present case, it appears that the debts listed on Schedule F are primarily consumer debts. The debtors checked on the Petition that the nature of the debts are consumer/non-business. The U.S. Trustee asked the debtors if this was correct, and received no response.

**(2) The Granting of Relief under Chapter 7 Constitutes
Substantial Abuse of Chapter Seven of the Bankruptcy Code.**

To satisfy the "substantial abuse" standard under Section 707(b), the Eighth Circuit has ruled that the primary consideration is whether the debtor has the ability to fund a 13 plan. *In re Walton*, 866 F.2d 981, 984 (8th Cir. 1989) (following *In re Kelly*, 841 F.2d 908, 914-15 (9th Cir. 1988); *United States Trustee v. Harris*, 960 F.2d 74, 76 (8th Cir. 1992); *Fonder v. United States*, 974 F.2d 996, 999 (8th Cir. 1992); *Huckfeldt v. Huckfeldt (In re Huckfeldt)*, 39 F.3d 829, 831 (8th Cir. 1994) (comparing § 707(b) to § 707(a)).

While bad faith on the part of the debtor may constitute substantial abuse under Section 707(b), bad faith is not required to be shown to satisfy the "substantial abuse" standard when the debtor is otherwise able to repay his or her debts out of future income:

This is not to say that inability to pay will shield a debtor from section 707(b) dismissal where bad faith is otherwise shown. But a finding that a debtor is able to pay his debts, standing alone, supports a conclusion of substantial abuse.

Walton, 866 F.2d at 985 (quoting *In re Kelly*, 841 F.2d at 914-15); *Harris*, 960 F.2d at 76 (stating that "egregious behavior" by the debtor is not a necessary element for a Chapter 7 case to be dismissed

under Section 707(b)). While the unique hardships and the good faith of the debtor are relevant factors, those factors are not as important as the ability of the debtor to fund a Chapter 13 plan. *Walton*, 866 F.2d at 983; *see also Harris*, 960 F.2d at 77 (rejecting the "totality of the circumstances" test espoused by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in *Green v. Staples (In re Green)*, 934 F.2d 568, 572 (4th Cir. 1991), in favor of examining whether a debtor may fund a Chapter 13 plan out of future income).

Whether the debtor is eligible to file a petition under Chapter 13 after a Section 707(b) dismissal is also not a relevant factor, and likewise, the debtor cannot be forced to file a Chapter 13 petition after a 707(b) dismissal order is entered if the debtor is qualified for Chapter 13 relief. *Fonder*, 974 F.2d at 999. "The essential inquiry remains whether the debtor's ability to repay creditors with future income is sufficient to make the Chapter 7 liquidating bankruptcy a substantial abuse of the Code." *Id.*

In addition, the Eighth Circuit holds that a bankruptcy court may reject the credibility of amended schedules when the amendments are offered after a Section 707(b) motion is filed and the amended schedules seek to decrease income and/or increase expenses because the debtor swore as to the accuracy of the initial schedules. *Fonder*, 974 F.2d at 1000.

In the present case, the debtors have a duty to cooperate with the Office of the United States Trustee by providing it with information to determine whether the case should be dismissed for substantial abuse. Under Section 707(b), Congress has designated the United States Trustee as the only party, besides the Bankruptcy Court, who has standing to bring a Section 707(b) motion to dismiss. As noted above in the analysis of Section 707(a), the debtor has a duty to cooperate with the

United States Trustee pursuant to the Bankruptcy Code and the Local Bankruptcy Rules. Federal Bankruptcy Rule 1017(e)(1) recognizes that the debtors must turnover information by allowing the United States Trustee to designate the documents that must be submitted by the debtor prior to or at the hearing held pursuant to Section 707(b).

This Bankruptcy Court, in *In re Veenhuis*, 143 B.R. 887 (Bankr. D. Minn. 1992)(Dreher, J.), noted that the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals did not eliminate bad faith analysis under its ability to pay analysis:

[T]here is nothing in either *Harris* or *Walton* that suggests that the ability to fund a chapter 13 plan out of future earnings is the *only* factor to consider [for Section 707(b) abuse]. On the contrary, the Walton court expressly stated that ‘the court may take the petition’s good faith and unique hardships into consideration under section 707(b).’ *Walton*, 866 F.2d at 983. Furthermore, both *Harris* and *Walton* cited with approval language from *In re Kelly*, 841 F.2d 908 (9th Cir. 1988), stating that the inability to fund a chapter 13 plan out of future earnings will not ‘shield a debtor from section 707(b) dismissal where bad faith is otherwise shown.’ *Harris*, 960 F.2d at 76; *Walton*, 866 F.2d at 985. To hold otherwise would defeat section 707(b)’s goal of denying a discharge both to debtors who are non-needy and those who are dishonest....

In re Veenhuis, 143 B.R. at 888.

The failure of the debtor to submit the information requested will prevent the United States Trustee from determining whether substantial abuse is present. It is reasonable that such conduct by the debtor, which cause the United States Trustee and the Bankruptcy Court to be unable to make an ability to pay analysis, is a basis to dismiss a case for substantial abuse. The United States Trustee requests that the Bankruptcy Court dismiss this case for substantial abuse if the debtors fail to provide all of the requested documentation at the hearing on this motion.

In the alternative, the United States Trustee requests that the Court find substantial abuse is present based on Schedule I plus 401k contributions and loan repayment less Schedule J, as adjusted in the motion.

WHEREFORE, the United States Trustee submits this memorandum in support of his motion to dismiss the above-captioned case as a substantial abuse of the Bankruptcy Code.

Dated: June 9, 2004

Respectfully submitted,

HABBO G. FOKKENA
United States Trustee
Region 12

By: /s/ Sarah J. Wencil
Sarah J. Wencil
Trial Attorney
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**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA**

In re:

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Chapter 7

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BK 04-31268

CERTIFICATE OF MAILING

I, Terri Frazer, certify under penalty of perjury that I am an employee in the Office of the United States Trustee for the District of Minnesota and am a person of such age and discretion as to be competent to serve papers.


That on June 9, 2004, I served a copy of the Proposed Notice of Hearing, Motion to Dismiss Under 11 U.S.C. §707, Memorandum of Law in Support of Motion to Dismiss; and proposed Order in the above-referenced case by placing said copy in a postpaid envelope addressed to the person(s) hereinafter named, at the place and address stated below, which is the last known address, and by depositing said envelope and contents in the United States Mail at Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Addressee(s):

Jon L. and Janet M. Johnson
57854 - 718th Street
Jackson, MN 56143

Jeff David Bagniefski
PO Box 6
Rochester, MN 55903

Charles W. Ries
201 N. Broad Street, #200
P.O. Box 7
Mankato, MN 56002



**Office of the United States Trustee
Terri Frazer**

**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA**

In re:

Jon L. and Janet M. Johnson

Chapter 7

Debtor(s).

BK 04-31268

ORDER

At St Paul, Minnesota, the _____ day of _____, 2004, this matter came before the Court for hearing on the Motion of the United States Trustee's Office for an Order dismissing this Chapter 7 case pursuant to 11 U.S.C. §707(a) and (b). Appearances were noted in the record.

The Court made its findings of fact and conclusions of law on the record pursuant to Rule 52 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure and Bankruptcy Rule 7052.

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED:

That the Chapter 7 bankruptcy case filed by the above-captioned debtors is dismissed pursuant to 11 U.S.C. Section 707.

Chief Judge Gregory F. Kishel
United States Bankruptcy Judge